



**University of
Zurich**^{UZH}

**Zurich Open Repository and
Archive**

University of Zurich
University Library
Strickhofstrasse 39
CH-8057 Zurich
www.zora.uzh.ch

Year: 2011

Review of: Randall C. Zachman, John Calvin as teacher, pastor and theologian: The shape of his writings and thought (Grand rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 277. and Randall C. Zachman, Image and word in the theology of John Calvin (Notre Dame,IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 536.

Opitz, Peter

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930608004407>

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich

ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-50615>

Journal Article

Published Version

Originally published at:

Opitz, Peter (2011). Review of: Randall C. Zachman, John Calvin as teacher, pastor and theologian: The shape of his writings and thought (Grand rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 277. and Randall C. Zachman, Image and word in the theology of John Calvin (Notre Dame,IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 536. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 64(1):117-120.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930608004407>

virtue ethics than Adams permits himself here. In particular, it would have been interesting to observe how Adams would work out the relation between the ideal of transcendent goodness and the particular goods towards which the virtuous person relates in an excellent way. Might it not be the case that a transcendent reference point would transform our conceptions of excellence, in such a way as to undermine widely held assumptions about what counts as a genuinely excellent/virtuous stance towards transient goods?

One further point – many readers of this journal will be struck by the similarities between Adams's theory of virtues and the theories of religious sentiments and virtues developed by that other Reformed Platonist, Jonathan Edwards. Yet Edwards is never cited, either in this book or in *Finite and Infinite Goods*. While Adams undoubtedly does not need suggestions for a further project, it would be fascinating – and no doubt illuminating – to see how he would engage Edwards's thought. At any rate, *A Theory of Virtue* represents a distinctive and important contribution to virtue ethics, which merits – and will undoubtedly receive – widespread engagement.

Jean Porter

University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556, USA

jean.porter.3@nd.edu

doi:10.1017/S0036930608004407

Randall C. Zachman, *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor and Theologian: The Shape of his Writings and Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 277. \$24.99.

Randall C. Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 536. \$55.00.

The first volume (2006), of two books about the theology of John Calvin by the same author, is a collection of articles which have appeared in different publications in recent years. The first part contains a comparison of Calvin's understanding of the teaching office with Melancthon, some reflections about the *Institutes*, different aspects of Calvin's interpretation of the scripture and his catechetical intention. The overall theme of the second part, which deals with Calvin the theologian, is the relationship between 'Image' and 'Word', 'seeing' and 'hearing', in Calvin's theology. A comparison between Luther and Calvin on the issue, Calvin as 'analogical' theologian, the relationship between 'manifestation' and 'proclamation' and finally Christ as the 'living image' of God are the topics. Zachman's overall thesis is that a main theological concern of the Genevan Reformer was to try 'to combine what we hear with what we see' (2006, p. 209). It is connected

with the complaint that Calvin has often been interpreted as a theologian of the Word who excludes the awareness of God's works and the praise of God's manifestations in the creation.

The second work (2007) elaborates on that issue much further. It is especially the importance of 'seeing' in Calvin which Zachman attempts to show. Already the titles of the chapters, which follow the main structure of the last *Institutes*, speak well for Zachman's specific approach to Calvin's texts. The first part, titled 'The living Images of God the Creator' (2007, pp. 25–104), deals with the universe as the living image of God, symbols of God's goodness in the present life and the manifestations of the providential care of God. The second part, 'The Living Images of God the Redeemer' (2007, pp. 107–435), takes topics such as the manifestation of God and of Christ in the Old Testament (e.g. the Tabernacle, the Pillar of Fire, the Temple), the iconic language of the Prophets, the living image of God in Jesus Christ, the Gospel as the living portrait of Jesus Christ, the manifestation of piety in the church, the revelation of the thoughts of the heart, the marks of the children of God and the revelation of the children of God.

Zachman displays a thorough knowledge of Calvin's works, not only with the *Institutes* but also (and foremost) with Calvin's exegetical writings. He seems to have found a treasure trove of 'visual' material in Calvin's language. However, Zachman stumbles somewhat in arguing that for Calvin the 'interdependence of Word and work of God, or proclamation and manifestation, is . . . central of the way he thinks theologically' (2007, p. 7). This seems to be at odds with his latter claims that 'an unresolvable tension lies at the heart of Calvin's discussion of the living images of God' (2007, p. 439) and that Calvin at important points contradicts himself (cf. 2007, p. 231) or fails to realise his own vision of worship by favouring 'often heavy penitential' liturgical rites (2007, p. 20) instead of cultivating the use of 'symbols'. It is certainly not impossible that the most consistent Reformed theologian of the sixteenth century contradicts himself regarding a central issue both in theory and in practice. However, in this case it seems to be much more likely that Zachman's angle and 'modern' religious intention misses Calvin's central theological concern. Zachman mostly ignores the large section about sin (*Institutes* II. 1–5) which separates the doctrine of the knowledge of God the Creator from the doctrine of the knowledge of God the Redeemer. Also, when Zachman refers to Calvin's exegesis of Psalm 19 as an important example for the Reformer's understanding of the universe as the 'living icon of God', he omits Calvin's point which is an interpretation of Psalm 19 by Romans 1 and not a doctrine of a good balance between 'seeing' and 'hearing'. The reason does not lie in Calvin preferring 'hearing'

to 'seeing' in an abstract way, but in his opinion that God has chosen the history of a specific nation for his intercourse with mankind blinded by sin, which is told and explained in human words, including iconic language. On the other hand Zachman overstates the theological consequences of Calvin's use of 'visual' language and his praise for nature's gifts. Calvin's 'middle way' between Zwingli and Luther in terms of the sacraments cannot so easily be interpreted as an 'increasingly positive assessment of gestures, rites and ceremonies' which 'opens avenues of access to Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Anglican understanding of worship' (2007, p. 21). Was all the Puritan criticism of the Anglican rites just a fundamental misunderstanding of Calvin's *Institutio*?

To Zachman's claim that Calvin 'was passionately interested in contemplation of the heavens' (2007, p. 19) it must be said that, contrary to the 'enlightened' learned of the eighteenth century, Calvin had no interest in the beauty of the Geneva area simply because he lived in a different time; and the fact that Calvin consulted a medical work in order to interpret the word 'cancer' in 2 Tim 2:17 is hardly a convincing argument for the claim for his passionate interest in the study of the intricacies of the human body (2007, p. 19). From a historical viewpoint, it is regrettable that Zachman shows no sign of having taken any other source or author of Calvin's time into account in order to place the reformer (and his rhetorical method) in the context of the Renaissance humanism.

And theologically, Zachman unfortunately seems to have neglected almost completely the long discussion about Calvin's epistemology concerning God the Creator (admittedly many of the works on this discussion are in German, French or Dutch), including the role of his 'Platonism' and the possible theological implications for our modern understanding of the creation (see e.g. the critical discussion of Barth while referring to Calvin by Berkhof, Moltmann, Link). Zachman attempts to portray Calvin as a theologian who favoured the 'modern' line of 'contemplation, feeling and enjoying' to the far less attractive or fashionable line of 'preaching, reading and teaching' (2006, p. 195) – emphasised by twentieth-century theologians of the 'word'. However, it is also a common experience of our time to be bored or even scared by 'contemplating' the stars or the emptiness of the universe and it can be very enjoyable simply to 'listen' to the story of the invisible God addressing himself to us through the biblical authors. Barth and Bultmann are not part of the problem (see 2007, pp. 19–21) but rather important attempts to give serious theological answers to the deep break which has taken place in the intellectual and cultural history concerning our perception of the nature as creation.

As these remarks indicate, Zachman's thesis is a provocation for the traditional Protestant interpretation of Calvin, and many questions wait to be answered more precisely. Nevertheless, the result of this 'unorthodox' reading of Calvin is impressive and stimulating. It reminds us of an often neglected fact in the history of Calvinist piety: that God the Redeemer is still God the Creator.

Peter Opitz

Institut für Schweizerische Reformationsgeschichte, 8001 Zürich, Switzerland

opitzp@theol.uzh.ch

doi:10.1017/S0036930608004390

Gilles Emery OP, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, tr. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. xii + 419. £65.00.

In this work Gilles Emery aims at his first systematic presentation of St Thomas' treatment of the Trinity as a whole, concentrating on this in its most developed form, namely as it appears in the *Summa Theologiae*. (The *Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas* is not to be confused with his two collections of his essays on topics related to the Trinity, despite the similarity in title.)

His discussion sets St Thomas' treatment of the Trinity in the *Summa* in relation to the treatment he offers in other works, both those closest to the *Summa* (the Disputed Questions *de Potentia* and his commentary on St John's Gospel) and earlier works distinct in aim and less developed in thought. He situates St Thomas' position in relation to the approaches of those who preceded him, Anselm, Richard of St Victor, Bonaventura and a multiplicity of others. At every point, he reveals how deeply St Thomas' thought is rooted in that of the Cappadocians and Greek tradition, while avoiding treatment of later controversies such as that with Palamism. He shows how the avoidance of Arianism and Sabellianism, along with Aquinas' reflection on scripture, compels Aquinas to consider the distinctions between the Persons of the Trinity as arising from actions immanent to the Trinity and not matters of the workings ('economy') of God towards the world in creation and salvation. Fr Emery judiciously draws upon his detailed study of a very large range of patristic and mediaeval authors in such a way as to show how St Thomas' presentation disguises his remarkable capacity to steer through a maze of controversy of which the modern reader knows little, so many problems so exactly dealt with, without prejudicing the limpid clarity and order which enables us to profit from him today.

For St Thomas, it is only by understanding the immanent Trinity as fundamental that we can get a true understanding of the economy. In Emery's view, people tend to have a false conception of the structure of the *Summa*,